

# Negotiating with Post-Soviet Military Officers

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*If you strike steel, pull back. If you strike mush, push forward.*—V.I. Lenin

*It is the last [20] minutes of negotiation that counts.*—Andrei Gromyko

*In general, it may be a bad practice to take a sledgehammer to swat a fly. With the Russians it is sometimes necessary.*—George F. Kennan

**C**OLONEL Colin Dunn, U.S. Army, is credited with saying that every meeting that involves strategic leaders is a negotiation.<sup>1</sup> By extension, each time a strategic leader encounters a foreign counterpart, he is involved in an international negotiation of sorts. Because strategy is contingent on the situation, there is no single best way to negotiate.

The United States had a long rivalry and rich history of bilateral negotiations with Moscow during the Cold War. Contact continues on a regular basis with representatives from the Russian Federation at multiple levels on numerous topics such as arms control, security cooperation, coalition operations, the Global War on Terrorism, and peacekeeping. But 10 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Soviet culture still strongly influences Eurasian officers. This tradition is actively promoted by Cold War-era educational institutions that suffer from arrested development and outdated Soviet doctrine. Especially in Russia, there has been disappointingly little opportunity to interact with U.S. officers. Post-Soviet military officers are often surprised by the basic premise of the U.S. negotiating model, which requires building credibility, finding shared interests, learning the other side's position in depth, and sharing information to persuade an opponent to agree to an outcome favorable to both sides.<sup>2</sup>

America's approach to negotiations often fails to recognize Russia's struggle of domination over submission. The Russians will often scorn and try to

exploit American negotiators they perceive to be confused, weak, vacillating, or uncertain.<sup>3</sup> Russians use obfuscation and deceit extensively to compensate for their own feelings of inferiority and weakness. Negotiators also must understand the Russian tendency to test authority. In practice and theory, post-Soviet military officers view effective negotiations differently. U.S. military leaders must study and apply effective negotiation principles and techniques. Power in negotiations is the ability to get what is wanted from a dispute or having a claim granted or a rejection upheld.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, most published information describes negotiations conducted only at the highest levels. Negotiators involved in the normal bureaucratic process of government are not encouraged to record their views.<sup>5</sup> The absence of such records dooms many officers to committing mistakes they could have easily avoided if they had learned from others' experiences.

Failing to employ effective negotiation principles can have devastating consequences. Although the U.S. is the world's only remaining superpower, weaker states can often achieve victory through superior negotiation skills.<sup>6</sup> A negotiator can become effective through training and practice. The Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF) recognizes the importance of negotiation skills for strategic leaders and devotes special attention to their development.<sup>7</sup>

## Cultural Context

The cultural context in which U.S. negotiators operate and are taught negotiation strategies assumes like-minded individuals will be sitting across the table.<sup>8</sup> But, whether dealing with Arabs, Chinese, or Russians, each officer must understand how bargaining culture plays a role in developing negotiating strategy and tactics. Negotiators from hierarchical



US Army

Stabilization  
Force commander  
LTG William E. Ward  
with Russian  
officers in Bosnia.

cultures spend proportionally more time discussing power when resolving disputes and making deals than negotiators from egalitarian cultures.<sup>9</sup> Culture, emotion, and strategy are three reasons why disputants focus on power in negotiation. Great negotiators make skilled use of explicit and implicit threats.<sup>10</sup>

Regardless of culture, when one negotiator focuses on power, the other is likely to reciprocate.<sup>11</sup> In fact, following the precepts of Carl von Clausewitz, the Communists regard negotiation as one way of waging “war by other means.”<sup>12</sup> While some principles outlined here are traditionally Soviet, Marxist-Leninist precepts continue to influence senior strategic leaders in Eurasia. Further, the bleak economic situation in Eurasia usually guarantees any negotiation session will have a substantial economic component. Interaction with an American negotiator inevitably arouses expectations of financial gain. Looking for this hidden agenda and understanding how it fits into the opponent’s philosophy of negotiation is important.

The fundamental concept of negotiations, when compared to the Russian approach, is not always symmetrical. Understanding what analyst T.O. Jacobs refers to as positional negotiation, which is essentially an adversarial relationship, is also important.<sup>13</sup> In this case, the negotiation process is a win-

lose situation in which any gains by the opponent are losses by the home team. Examining positional negotiation is important. Soft bargainers risk having their lunches eaten by hard bargainers.<sup>14</sup>

### Negotiation Philosophies

The table outlines approaches to taking the initiative, controlling the agenda, and establishing favorable ground rules. Both parties collect information on personalities and positions, but Russians are more likely to be secretive and use disinformation to misrepresent their position.<sup>15</sup>

The U.S. view of exchanging commitments and promises in the context of negotiating is not dissimilar to the Russian’s agreement in principle. Certainly, negotiation is preferable to the alternative (such as war), but Russia uses tactics to mislead opponents searching for common ground into believing there is a consensus when one exists in theory only. This technique can be quite effective against soft bargainers: American negotiators look for quick results, and the Russians know this.

A key area where approaches differ is the relationship between negotiating parties. The Russian negotiating model is more contentious regarding relationships, attaching no importance to establishing an affinity with the other side. In fact, it often works against forming such a bond. If the Russians expect

no long-term relationship, then achieving a relationship is not likely.

Russians get a psychological lift from working with Americans because they regard American cooperation during negotiations as recognition of their co-equal status.<sup>16</sup> The Russian attempts to establish a position of dominance and superiority, a stance often at odds with the more cooperative American style. A Russian frequently feels threatened when peers think he is buddies with a foreigner.

Russians often have dominant bosses inclined to make big decisions, delegate some authority, then abruptly take it back. The American negotiator's approach is forceful, explicit, legalistic, urgent, and results-oriented. Americans tend to be blunt, uncomfortable with silence, and these often ignore body language.<sup>17</sup> In the Russian view, obtaining respect is more important than establishing a relationship; it is also a prerequisite.

### **“Over My Dead Body!”**

During negotiations on the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty before the end of the Cold War, a small American delegation, led by R. James Woolsey, thought they were meeting informally with Soviet Minister of Defense (MOD) Dmitri Yazov. Instead, the group was led into a large conference room where about 25 flag officers were present. Yazov made a 15-minute speech on how important peace was to the Soviet Union. Woolsey tried to raise an issue (the purpose of the meeting), but Yazov continued lecturing and ignored him. This went on for hours. Eventually, Yazov arose, jabbed his finger across the big table at Woolsey, and told him loudly that the issue would not be resolved until there was naval arms control and the USSR could finally impose limits on U.S. aircraft carriers and submarines. Unexpectedly, Woolsey slammed his hand down on the table and in an equally loud voice said, “Over my dead body!” All the generals and admirals in the room were stunned. They paused, then broke into big grins.

Yazov rocked back, grinned, pounded his chest, and spoke forcefully in Russian: “*Tolko cherez moi tryb!*”—coarse Russian slang for “over my dead body!” Not understanding the situation, Woolsey stood up to find a quick exit. All 25 flag officers, led by Yazov, walked around the table, and as they filed past, they grinned, shook his hand, and told him “*Molodets!*” (Way to go!)<sup>18</sup> This inadvertent negotiation tactic created a breakthrough and later yielded positive results. Woolsey was surprised by the Soviet reaction, but to those who understand the macho behavior in the Soviet/Russian military culture, it was predictable.

During my experience as Army Attaché to Ukraine, I encountered a similar situation with a Ukrainian general and his staff during negotiations over the first-time use of a contractor for exercise support (food and fuel) instead of direct payments to MOD bank accounts. The commander of ground forces in Kyiv [Kiev] requested I meet with the two-star general responsible for a multilateral peacekeeping exercise located hours away to work through the problem.

After arriving, I was taken to a large room where the general and 20 of his most senior staff officers were. As I tried to explain the plan to the group, which vehemently opposed the idea, I was repeatedly interrupted and verbally attacked simultaneously by multiple officers in the room. Recognizing it as an ambush, I stood up to end the encounter and told the group I was leaving. As I got to my vehicle, a Ukrainian colonel hurriedly approached and told me the general requested that I stay, promising to convene a private meeting in his office. This session yielded far more results, and the Ukrainian side reluctantly accepted the plan. The post-Soviet officer will use intimidation and bullying extensively against the “weak” Americans if they believe such tactics will work.

Trust, as it relates to relationships, is another area where the two sides differ. Several factors on the Russian side make trust difficult: suspicion of foreigners; native Russian fear and hostility; and the sense of injury. A negotiator must have a heightened insight into the Russian fear of foreign penetration, loss of internal unity, and being plundered by marauding capitalists with advanced technology and vast funding.<sup>19</sup> While not a touchy-feely issue, this is a dynamic that occurs over time and with positive contact with the opposing side.<sup>20</sup> The process is a contest in which each negotiator can take nothing for granted and can never relax.

In both approaches, understanding the importance of managing expectations in a negotiation and of creating doubts and uncertainties in the minds of opponents is important. However, while the American negotiator wants his counterpart to underestimate his capabilities, the Russian does the opposite, using exaggeration and aggressive posturing. Frequently, a Russian negotiator will listen and assess the opposition's opening position. He rarely opens discussions with a position close to the final objective. Often Russians will feign that any agreement is not in the Russian interest and, that generally, compromise is a sign of weakness.

Although the aggressive Russian approach can make it appear an agreement is far off, it has a practical side—the Russian version of the zone of

## **Two Approaches to Negotiation**

<b>Symmetry</b>	<b>Typical U.S. Officer<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Post-Soviet Officer Model<sup>2</sup></b>
Yes	The first rule: <i>there are no assumed rules for negotiation.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Attempts to hide, set, or “capture” the agenda.</li> <li>□ Characterized by intelligence-gathering and secrecy.</li> </ul>
Yes	Essence of negotiation: provides opportunity for parties to <i>exchange commitments and promises.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Sees negotiation as an alternative to conflict.</li> <li>□ Waits for other side to reveal its position.</li> <li>□ Uses agreement in principle <i>to get into nitty-gritty details where confidence in their techniques is highest.</i></li> </ul>
No	<i>Relationship between parties</i> is the most critical variable in determining the climate and ultimate outcome of negotiation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Has no concept of <i>permanent</i> friendly relations between states.</li> <li>□ Adopts aggressive stance.</li> <li>□ Stalls, repeats, and uses pressure tactics.</li> <li>□ Is rude, abusive, intimidating, and uses ridicule.</li> <li>□ Uses persistence, silence, and intransigence.</li> <li>□ <i>Time is seemingly of no consequence.</i></li> </ul>
No	<i>Trust</i> is the central issue of a relationship— <i>not a touchy-feely sentiment, but a type of conclusion based on experience. Trust might be a conclusion, never an assumption.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Is suspicious of foreigners.</li> <li>□ Projects fear and hostility.</li> <li>□ Projects sense of injury and encirclement.</li> <li>□ Uses agreement in principle <i>to induce sense of relaxation and good will.</i></li> </ul>
Yes	Basically, negotiator <i>creates doubts and uncertainties</i> in others to the viability of their positions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Views opponent as skillful and deceptive.</li> <li>□ Believes compromise does not exist.</li> <li>□ Postures that an agreement is of U.S. interest, not Russian.</li> <li>□ Uses image projections, <i>speaking for world, strength, virtuousness.</i></li> </ul>
Yes	<i>Manages opponent expectations</i> , causing counterpart to underestimate expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Uses agreement in principle <i>to create hopefulness that an agreement is near.</i></li> </ul>
Yes	Zone of possible agreement <i>ranges from least favorable terms to the most favorable one that is believed the opponent would accept.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Possesses well-developed pragmatism.</li> <li>□ See little variance between minimum and maximum objectives.</li> </ul>
Yes	Best alternative to negotiated agreement (BATNA). <i>Contingency analysis.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Sees negotiation as desirable and necessary. <i>BATNA probably unacceptable.</i></li> </ul>

1. See Thomas R. Colosi, *On and Off the Record: Colosi on Negotiation* (New York: American Arbitration Association, 2001).

2. Taken from two sources: Jerrold L. Schector, *Russian Negotiating Behavior* (Washington, DC: U.S. Peace Press, 2001), and Gerald L. Steibel, *How Can We Negotiate with the Communists?* (New York: National Strategy Information Center, 1972).

possible agreement. Because negotiation is desirable, even necessary in the first place, each side probably sees negotiation as a way to improve its position. The best alternative to a negotiated agreement is probably not a good option for the Russian side; otherwise they would not be negotiating.

### Adapting Principles to Prevail

With adaptation, U.S. negotiating principles can achieve success in bilateral environments. Two areas that demand significant differences in approach are the importance of building a relationship between the parties and establishing trust. These have no mirror image on the Russian side.

The two negotiation cultures differ substantially. The Russian approach might employ rudeness, abuse, intimidation, and ridicule, making a relationship all but impossible. Making goodwill gestures only arouses suspicion and creates the appearance of weakness. Any attempt to act chummy with counterparts invites repulse. Also, a Russian who acts friendly toward Americans is the object of private and public ridicule by his colleagues. The appropriate response is to maintain good manners and be able to interpret aggressive rhetoric and deal with it.

While establishing trust, one must beware of the agreement in principle. Instead of lowering expectations, the Russian approach seeks to raise expectations under the guise of the agreement in principle, a technique used to encourage the opposition to relax and lower its guard. This technique

helps convince the opposition that an agreement is near when, in fact, a consensus does not exist.

### Earning Respect

Earning respect is more important than establishing a relationship and achieving trust. Establishing such conditions in a contentious atmosphere is a challenge. Planning for lengthy discussions eliminates the traditional advantage Russians use in exploiting time. Since trust is probably an elusive concept, a written protocol often helps capture the essence of discussions and brings meaning to generalized language. Oral agreements have little value. In addition, using a process observer who understands Russian (unhandicapped by the opaque veil of translation) can provide insights into the Russian thought process. In the same context, a negotiator should never grant an immediate tangible benefit in return for a promised future one. Silence is a two-edged sword. Russians view their own silence as disapproval; they view an American's silence as consent.<sup>21</sup>

Although negotiating with post-Soviet military officers can be difficult, adequate preparation and confidence improve the prospects for success. Globalization and the American culture often lead us to conclude that a convergence of ideas and perspectives is underway—that over time we will all see things the same way. This is a faulty assumption, especially when Russians are sitting across the negotiating table. **MR**

### NOTES

1. Colonel Colin Dunn, U.S. Army, Strategic Leadership Seminar, National Defense University (NDU), Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF), Washington, D.C., November 2002.
2. T.O. Jacobs, *Strategic Leadership: The Competitive Edge*, (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2002), 167.
3. Raymond F. Smith, *Negotiating with the Soviets* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 43.
4. Jeanne M. Brett, *Negotiating Globally* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2001), 98.
5. Gilbert R. Winham, "Practitioners' Views of International Negotiation," *World Politics* (October 1979): 111.
6. William Mark Habeels, *Power and Tactics in International Negotiations* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 143-44; Thomas R. Colosi, *On and Off the Record: Colosi on Negotiation* (New York: American Arbitration Association, 2001).
7. The ICAF, NDU, a Senior Service College, as part of the professional military education for senior military and government leaders, dedicates a seminar and a practical exercise to developing these critical skills. The primary texts the college uses are Jacobs and Colosi.
8. Colosi, ix.
9. Brett, 110.
10. Michael Watkins and Susan Rosegrant, *Breakthrough International Negotiation: How Great Negotiators Transformed the World's Toughest Post-Cold War Conflicts* (San

- Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), xix.
11. W.L. Adair, "Exploring the Norm of Reciprocity in the Global Market: U.S. and Japanese Intra- and Intercultural Negotiations," *Academy of Management Proceedings*, Briarcliff, New York, 1999; Adair, "Reciprocity in the Global Market: Cross-Cultural Negotiations," dissertation, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.
12. Gerald L. Steibel, *How Can We Negotiate with the Communists?* (New York: National Strategy Information Center, 1972), 34.
13. Jacobs, 167.
14. *Ibid.*, 169.
15. LTC Timothy C. Shea, "Post-Soviet Maskirovka, Cold War Nostalgia and Peace-time Engagement," *Military Review* (March-April 2002): 63-67.
16. Jerrold L. Schector, *Russian Negotiating Behavior* (Washington, DC: U.S. Peace Press, 2001), 91.
17. "U.S. Negotiating Behavior," *United States Institute of Peace Special Report*, Washington, D.C., October 2002. See on-line at <www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr94.html>, accessed 4 November 2002, 1.
18. P. Edward Haley, ed., *Arms Control and the End of the Cold War: An Oral History of the Negotiation on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe* (Claremont, CA: Keck Center for International and Strategic Studies, Claremont McKenna College, 2002), 93-95.
19. Schector, 115.
20. Colosi, 21.
21. Smith, 50.

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